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COMMUNITY,
BRINGS ART
INTO OUR LIVES
IN UNEXPECTED
WAYS, AND
CREATES
COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT IN
THE ARTS.**



BEILI LIU

EACH AND EVERY



PREVIOUS:
INSTALLATION VIEW OF
CHILDREN'S CLOTHING ENCASED
IN CEMENT

ABOVE:
INSTALLATION VIEW OF
PERFORMANCE TABLE, COLORFUL
CHILDREN'S CLOTHING, AND
CEMENT- COATED THREAD AND
CLOTHING

JUNE 25 - AUGUST 31, 2019



ABOVE:
DETAIL OF CHILDREN'S CLOTHING
ENCASED IN CEMENT

FORWARD

Austin-based artist Beili Liu first visited MadArt Studio in the summer of 2018. As an artist whose site-responsive, installation-based practice is driven by both material and process, this visit was a launching point for over a year of project development that culminated in her exhibition, *Each and Every*.

Liu's material decisions are influenced by their social, historical, cultural, and personal significance. She considers a medium's inherent ability to extrapolate complex cultural narratives when paired with other contrasting media. The work in *Each and Every* is no different. Combining industrial cement, children's clothing, and common thread, this exhibition is a platform rich with association and meaning.

During her initial visit, Liu was intrigued by Seattle's ubiquitous brick masonry buildings—a distinguishing characteristic of MadArt Studio—and the contrasting color and texture of the unifying gray mortar and stacked red brick forms. She was particularly drawn to the conceptual richness of the mortar and how, once activated by water, the material creates a monochromatic bind. In the weeks and months that Liu began to develop her exhibition proposal, the

national conversation was focused on the atrocities inflicted on migrant children and their families at the southern border of the United States. This context, combined with a layered personal connection to working with children's clothing, led Liu to her material selection for the show.

Each and Every is a stunning presentation of hundreds of articles of children's clothing that have been quieted by industrial cement. They line the studio floor, occupying a rectilinear space that is expansive (29' x 27' x 23') and penetrates the building's structure. Though the garments have been transformed by cement—losing most of their identifying character—they maintain the drapes, folds, and materiality familiar to fabric. In many of the pieces, the design and iconography of contemporary childhood shows through, with grayscale Hello Kitty figures, hoodies with built-in animal ears, and faintly-colored Transformers. They carry the feel of graphite drawings, with accentuated contrasting details under a muted guise.

Each of the garments is positioned amongst its neighbors, filling the space in a unified formation that embodies a sense of order and control.

Poised just inches above the ground, the carefully-sculpted objects allude to absent forms, recalling those the clothing belonged to. Most of them are outgrown, overworn belongings of Liu's five-and-a-half-year-old daughter Cyan, while others are donations from friends, family, and community members. It was important to Liu that these objects have a history, have a story.

Above the expanse of clothing, thousands of lines of cement-dipped thread hang in an organic sequence, occupying the vertical space between the floor and ceiling. The soft and fluid form of the thread is in stark contrast with the unyielding garments below. Barely grazing the clothing and ascending up to 23 feet in some areas of the studio, these threads guide the viewer's eyes upwards, offering a sense of hope. The rise and fall of a barely-detectable soundtrack, created by Ohio-based musician and sound artist Chris Westhoff, envelops the work with faint echoes of cutting scissors and a creaking porch swing.

In conjunction with *Each and Every*, Liu incorporates a performance in which she sits in silent meditation, mending worn articles of brightly-colored clothing. The holes and tears are a testament to the lives the garments have lived. This performance is the third in a series in which Liu reimagines feminine labor as a redemptive and healing process. Through the continual and persistent act of sewing, she sits in protest as an artist, as an immigrant, and most importantly, as a mother. Expanding on her works that focus on the complex human experiences of diaspora and migration, *Each and Every* has evolved to be a tremendously personal project for Liu. It is through this lens that she is able to create a powerful installation that both acts as a space for empathy and a platform for understanding. ❖

EMILY KELLY
MADART STUDIO DIRECTOR



ABOVE:
PUBLIC PERFORMANCE STILL

NEXT:
**DETAIL OF CHILDREN'S
CLOTHING ENCASED IN CEMENT**



IN CONVERSATION WITH BEILI LIU

WHERE DID THE EXHIBITION TITLE *EACH AND EVERY* COME FROM?

We hear the news, read articles, and see images. We are saddened and shocked, but the news cycle moves on with relentless speed. We forget—consciously or subconsciously—and the numbers become abstract concepts. Between the refugee crisis and the migrant children tragedy, between national politics and our busy daily life, numbers become fleeting and numbing and fail to register any significance. I am the mother of a child. My child is the world to me. I know as a mother, that each child's life holds so much care, love, and promise—each day they wake up, each meal they eat, each night they fall asleep, each joyful laugh, each cry, each step taken, each word learned—each of these seemingly minute occurrences fuel the magic transformation that enables the growth of a human being. *Each and Every*, as a title, intends to bring our attention to that individual child, that very real, specific life and the magnitude of his or her world shattered with utter confusion and pain. *Each and Every* also directs our awareness to us as individuals, as witnesses to the situation. In the end,

it will always be up to each and every one of us, as to how we resolve and as to how we move on.

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR *EACH AND EVERY*?

There are multiple layers of consideration for the concept of *Each and Every*. The idea of the project evolved and changed multiple times throughout conceptualization and production of the project spanning over the past few years.

I've been saving my 5-year-old daughter's clothes. It is hard to let them go, they embraced her little body. They held her warmth and embodied my touch through laundering and folding, again and again. They recorded her life. I had hundreds of pieces of her garments, from her infancy through now. For the past several years, I have been exploring the possibility of using these pieces of clothing in a project. There is such abundance in our current time and life. These colorful, endearing pieces of soft clothes hold so much promise and tenderness, yet once outgrown, sadly most of them turn to waste.

In the summer of 2018, I came to visit MadArt Studio. I was taken by the open space with exposed metal beams, raw timbers, and especially, the red brick wall. The brick wall has been witness to the



ABOVE:
PERFORMANCE STILL OF LIU MENDING A PAIR OF
DINOSAUR-PRINTED PANTS

industrial past of the space and now provides a warmth rich with history. Conceptually, I was drawn to the grey mortar lines—the earthy powdery cement substance that is activated by water to become the bond that holds the brick forms together—giving the wall its structural strength. In my practice, I often make use of contrasting materials and processes. I am interested in fusing together the seemingly opposite in life—lightness versus heft; fragility contrasted with mass; and aggression countered by quiet resilience. The idea of combining children's clothing and concrete came as a direct response to the MadArt space in combination with my ongoing interest in exploring concept and meaning through materiality.

Furthermore, the time of my studio visit coincided with our national conversation of the migrant children crisis at the southern border of the United States, a tragic and unfathomable situation caused by our government's "zero-tolerance" policy of separating migrant children from their parents. Sadly, this is a situation that is yet to be resolved and the conversation quickly cycles in and out of the media once again. As a mother and an immigrant myself, my heart is heavy. *Each and Every* was conceptualized in its full form—seeded from the material juxtaposition and embodying my concern and response as an artist and mother—as a site-responsive

installation and performance piece responding to the dire situation of the migrant children crisis.

EACH AND EVERY INCLUDES A PERFORMANCE—CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS WORK AND WHY YOU CHOSE TO INCLUDE IT IN YOUR MADART STUDIO SHOW?

Sewing is an action that comes to me from a familiar and comforting place in a distant past. I learned to sew as a young child by watching my mother and other women in a rural Chinese village. The act of sewing is an act of care, a labor of love. Women in those villages sew all items related to the body, from clothes to shoes and bedding. Between working the farm and their daily household chores, they gather to sew and talk about their children, daily life, joys, and sadnesses. I have carried with me from the east to the west the most precious memories

of their calloused hands moving calmly with repetitive rhythm as they pulled threads through colorful textiles and chattered with laughter. In recent years, as a gesture of mending, resilience, and hope, I have made use of the action of sewing in my performances. In *Each and Every*, I sat in silence, facing the vast grey plane of hardened clothes and performed a simple action of mending damaged children's clothing. By stitching the tears and sealing the holes with thread, the clothes gain a new life and a renewed purpose. They now hold a promise that the warmth of a child's body will be present in them again. The performance

component of *Each and Every* brings together materiality, spatial intervention, artist labor, and feminist concerns into a narrative of motion and stillness, tension and calm.

WHAT ABOUT MADART STUDIO, HOW HAS WORKING IN THIS SPACE CHALLENGED YOU AS AN ARTIST?

I did not see working in MadArt Studio as a challenge. Rather, I saw it as a rare opportunity offered to me as a studio artist. Typically, my production is carried out in the privacy of my

personal studio. For me, a work only gains its meaning through sharing with my viewers. Being able to work in MadArt not only allowed a more intimate and direct connection with the installation's physicality, but it also offered openness and opportunity to engage with viewers. It is exciting to share the intense labor and the messiness of what goes on "behind the scenes." More importantly, I appreciated receiving thoughtful and sometimes poignant questions that helped me to reconsider my intention and hope for the work. Interactions with my viewers during production and installation helped me to better understand the work. I appreciated witnessing the connections people were able to

make with the work, even when it was still in progress. I am grateful for moments when visitors generously opened up to share with me their personal stories as fellow citizens, and sometimes, parents. These precious moments of exchange bring to me a deep sense of gratitude, and furthermore, an affirmation for my labor and commitment to realizing *Each and Every*. ❖





Beili Liu is a visual artist who creates material- and process-driven, site-responsive installations. Working with commonplace materials and elements such as thread, scissors, paper, stone, fire, and water, Liu manipulates their intrinsic qualities to extrapolate complex cultural narratives. Liu's work has been exhibited in Asia, Europe, and across the United States. She has held solo exhibitions at venues such as the Hå Gamle Prestegard, Norwegian National Art and Culture Center; Hua Gallery, London, UK; and the Chinese Culture Foundation in San Francisco. Additionally, Liu has been the recipient of many grants and awards including the 2016 Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Artistic Innovation and Collaboration Grant, and the 2018 Texas State Artist in 3D medium by the Texas State Legislature and the Texas Commission on The Arts. Liu's work has also received support from the National Endowment for the Arts (Museum of Southeast Texas, 2014).

Born in Jilin, China, Liu now lives and works in Austin, Texas. She received her MFA from The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and is currently a Professor of Art at The University of Texas at Austin.



PREVIOUS:
DETAIL OF COLORFUL
CLOTHING ON
PERFORMANCE TABLE

ABOVE:
LIU WITH EACH AND
EVERY

RIGHT:
NATURAL LIGHTING
CONDITIONS OF EACH
AND EVERY

**SPECIAL THANKS TO THE HANDS THAT HELPED
MAKE THIS EXHIBITION POSSIBLE:**

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